

Home Life on Early Ranches of Southwest Texas

CHAPTER IX

Isaac Newton Mitchell
Jackson County



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THE OLD MITCHELL HOME

From left to right on the porch: Miss Annie Mitchell (seated), Mrs. Callista Mitchell (standing), Laval Hensley, a neighbor, I. N. Mitchell and his wife, Mary Mitchell (near door), and C. S. Mitchell, near tripod.

"THE Mitchell family has lived and ranched on the Lavaca River and the Lavaca Bay for a hundred years," said C. S. Mitchell, "and it is a moot question as to whether the Mitchell family is a branch of the Lavacas, or the Lavacas are a member of the Mitchell family. I sometimes think I have as much Lavaca Bay waters in my veins as I have Mitchell blood."

Isaac Newton Mitchell, C. S. Mitchell's grandfather, was a South Carolinian. He developed a stomach trouble and was planning to go to Germany for his health. Acting upon a suggestion to "Go To Texas," he settled in what is now Lavaca county, near the present site of Hallettsville. Then he moved to Mitchell's Point. He was accidentally killed. His sons, Isaac Newton, Jr., and brother Daniel, assumed the responsibility of the family. Mitchell's Point being isolated, and not wishing to leave his mother and sisters alone, and, also, so that they might have neighbors, he bought four hundred acres of land of Keller League on Carancahua Bay. Then, too, the Mitchells wanted to be part of a community.

I. N. Mitchell, Jr., built a large house on the bay, and it is still standing. It had two rooms in front, two small rooms across the back with a hall between, and a loft for the men to sleep in. Back of these was a large dining room and kitchen, brought from the old Dan Mitchell estate. Later the mother moved to another place, and he bought out the family interests and became sole owner of this place. It was here he brought his bride in 1872. She was Callista Stapp, the daughter of a sheep and cattle rancher near Indianola. During the Civil War her father had lost most of his holdings, and moved to a plantation near Matagorda. She stayed with her Grandmother Rice and went to school for a while. Later "Miss Callista" boarded in the home of Mrs. Agnes Ward, and received training in music and the "Three R's" from a governess with the Ward children. When she was ready for college, the family was not able to send her. She and Isaac Newton Mitchell, Jr., had met while she was staying at the Wards. Mrs. Mitchell is the only one of the early families of that community who still lives there. She is a living monument to that pioneer mother whose number is diminishing rapidly.

"Aunt Car'line helped me rear my children," she said in response to my question about her early home life. "I educated my boys in Notre Dame."

I left her with a more profound appreciation of what she and other homemakers of her time had accomplished that makes possible the conveniences we enjoy today.

Pioneer homemaking was hard for her because she was more interested in cultural pursuits. But her duty was to her children, her husband, and her home. Mr. Mitchell had to be away much of the time tending to his ever-increasing herds of cattle. But, either her brother or his brother stayed with her at night. She would be confined at home for weeks at a time. The only outlet was by the schooner, operated by one of the neighbors which carried the mail, supplies, and passengers to Indianola once a week.

Shopped at Indianola

Part of the time she had a negro man cook who was fond of dried apples. "Miss Callista, we ain't got a thing to cook. I cooked the last dried apple yeste'dy. You must get in yo' buggy, an' go git some dried apples," was his favorite expression. But, there was plenty to eat. Pickled and dried beef were nearly always available. There were no flies. Dried beef was kept hanging out in the open air. There was an abundance of salt and dried fish. Okra, corn, and fruits were dried and kept in paper sacks. Fruits were also preserved by dipping in sugar syrup, dried and packed in stone jars, covered in a cloth dipped in brandy or white of an egg, and covered with beeswax. Preserves were kept in the same way. Naturally, there was an abundance of fish that could be secured from the bay. An animal could be butchered nearly any time fresh meat was needed. Pork meat and sausage were smoked and packed in ashes—layer of meat, layer of ashes—to keep during the summer months. Anything sweet was a luxury. Rice was plentiful. They drank black coffee. Sugar, flour, and cane syrup were bought by the barrel about once each year. The groceries were brought from Indianola by boat. There were practically no fresh vegetables. Stick candy and gum drops were the treats that Mr. Mitchell occasionally brought home for the children. "Big

brown turkey figs" were bought for special occasions.

When the children were small, Mr. Mitchell sometimes bought cloth for the children's clothes and occasionally cloth for Mrs. Mitchell's dresses. The first material he ever bought her for a dress was a piece of calico, the pattern being called "Thunder and Lightning." It was blue with large splotches of white figures. He bought a spool of thread and bright green silk buttons to fasten it down the front. She made it basque. Of course the buttons were not appropriate for either utilitarian purposes or for trimming. So she had to wait until she could go to her sister-in-law's to find buttons that could be used. "Why don't you use your pretty green buttons?" inquired Mr. Mitchell occasionally; but she never found any use for them.

Mrs. Mitchell went in the boat across the bay about twice each year to shop. Although it was only about thirty miles across it usually required one day to go, and one day to return, if the weather was favorable. One day she went over to see the dentist. The trip made her violently sick. One of the children became sick and started screaming. Another one of the children was playing around over the boat, and Mrs. Mitchell was afraid he might fall overboard. Shanghai Pierce, a noted character and ranchman, tied one of the boys with a rope and then tied the rope to his boot. He trotted the other one on his knee, and sang louder than the children screamed. Another man took charge of the baby.

The nearest physician lived at Texana, about fifteen miles away. Sometimes the family sent to Port Lavaca and Indianola for one. Mrs. Mitchell's grandmother, Mrs. Rice, whose husband had been a physician was with her when her first babies came. After Mrs. Rice's death her mother and a trained negro woman stayed with her. Frequently the physician would be several days late.

ADVERTISING

Is absolutely essential in attaining the greatest degree of success in the purebred cattle business, and this degree was never attained without some such advertising.

Mrs. Mitchell would take her clothes to the "Seep Wells" to wash when the water in the cistern was low. The "Seep Wells" were real blessings to that community. One day, B. Q. Ward, better known as "Uncle Ben Ward," noticed a wet spot on the ground on his home place, just a few yards from the edge of the water. He dug down a little ways and found fresh water. It furnished enough water for the stock. Nearly everyone in the community soon had "Seep Wells." These wells were usually about 6, 8, or 10 feet deep, and were big enough for a man to dig in with a spade. The dirt was drawn up with a rope propelled by a windlass. The hole was square, and was cased as the well was dug to keep it from caving in.

The first artesian well was dug about 1897 with a rotary rig, and was 370 feet deep. It created about as much excite-

ment as some of the oil wells did later. C. S. Mitchell, one of the sons, took samples of the water to Port Lavaca in beer bottles and distributed them among the bankers, business men, and at the hotel.

While Mrs. Mitchell was busy at home caring for the children, Mr. Mitchell was busy caring for his increasing herds of cattle. He bought 6,680 acres of land out of the Stephen F. Austin and George Ewing Leagues. He used as a brand the *Pot Hook A* and the *Dart*.

The Mitchell family was always interested in improving the land and stock. Shanghai Pierce probably brought the first Brahma bull to that section. It had been imported from India. Mrs. Annie Mitchell Crane, sister of I. N. Mitchell, Jr., bought the Brahma bull from Mr. Pierce. I. N. Mitchell, 2nd, probably bought one of the first white face bulls. He believed that if "a thing

was worth doing, it was worth doing well." He indicated this when he bought the old cypress wharf from Indianola about 1880 and cut it up into posts to be used in fencing his land. He dipped the posts into boiling pine tar, bought heavy wire staples, and used heavy galvanized barbed wire for the fencing, paying ten dollars a spool for the wire.

The Mitchells were Catholics, and were interested in their children receiving religious training. They fixed a little chapel in the attic which was used by the priest when he came. Later a little chapel was built on the bay for this and neighboring Catholic families.

Many of the families in that community employed a governess for their children. Mrs. Mitchell taught her children at home until they were about ten years of age. The boys were sent to St. Mary's in San Antonio preparatory to attend college. The daughter, Annie, attended a convent school there. When the boys entered Notre Dame, Mrs. Mitchell moved to South Bend to be near them. But I. N. 3rd, got sick, so she returned and opened the house on the bay. C. S. Mitchell graduated there in 1894, and Hugh C. in 1895. Annie attended the Ursuline Convent in Galveston.

2. TAKE A .22 RIFLE ON YOUR FISHING TRIP.

By MONROE H. GOODE, *An Experienced Big Game Hunter and Recognized Shooting Authority.*

THOUSANDS of enthusiastic anglers are and have been whipping placid lakes and rippling streams in almost every section of North America in search of some oversized member of the finny tribe. Fishermen, like hunters, are lured far afield as "distance lends enchantment." No fisherman or vacationist should ever embark on such a pleasure jaunt without his trusty, .22-caliber rifle with which to plug crows, water snakes, and turtles and for informal target shooting. H. G. Person, Columbus, Nebraska, coined two timely slogans when he said:

Kill the crow, and we will have more game.

Kill the water snakes and turtles, and we will have more fish.

Fishermen have frequent opportunities to reduce enemies of fish and game and at the same time afford themselves much fun. It may be while enroute to the fishing country, or during the rest period in the middle of the day, or on those off days that try the souls of anglers—nothing like a little sport with the rifle to break the monotony of these barren hours.

Most any of the high grade, recently developed, .22-caliber repeating rifles will suffice. Naturally, the arm should be accurate, safe, and equipped with adjustable telescope, peep, or open sights, the efficiency of which is in the order stated.

Bolt-action rifles are the most accurate, but the slowest to operate; pump and lever-action arms combine fair accuracy with good speed of fire; and great speed of fire is the principal forte of automatic arms, which, however, offer only mediocre accuracy.

Bolt fans will do well to choose from these arms: Winchester Model 52 Sporter, Savage Models 10 and 23AA, Remington Model 341-P, Winchester Model 69, Mossberg Models 43 and 46A, Stevens Model 066, or Savage Model 5.

Pump: Remington Model 121, Winchester Models 61 and 62, or Savage Model 29.

Lever: Marlin Model 39.

Automatic: Winchester Model 63, or Remington Model 241. Prices of these rifles range from about \$10.00 to \$88.50, the latter being the price of the superb Winchester 52 Sporter, the finest .22-caliber hunting, plinking, and informal target arm ever produced.

For small game and pest shooting, hollow point, .22 Long Rifle cartridges should always be used, as they offer higher killing power. For informal target shooting, composition bullets are preferable, as they disintegrate upon impact, lessening the danger from ricochets.

If one owns a valuable .22-caliber arm chambered for Shorts, Long and Long Rifle cartridges, it is advisable to use only the Long Rifle type, as they fit the chamber and throat of the barrel, while Shorts and Longs do not fit properly and must jump a short distance before contacting the rifling, which destroys accuracy and increases erosion. In the cheaper guns, these objections are of little moment, as the saving in the cost of ammunition will soon pay for a new barrel.

Shorts and Longs offer only ordinary accuracy even in arms especially made for them, since they are not as well balanced or as carefully loaded as the Long Rifle variety. Thus the Long Rifle cartridge affords finer accuracy, greater killing power, and longer barrel life.

A supply of regulation paper targets should be taken along and a suitable box or target frame on which to fasten them. An excellent metal, action target is the self-adjusting Van-Au-Matic, using composition targets. When a direct hit breaks the target, another of different color automatically drops into place.

Recreation on the Bay

There were lots of good times mingled with the hardships. B. Rhodes, a neighbor, made regular trips in the schooner to Indianola once a week. But during low tide or bad weather he could not make it. If that happened just before Christmas, Santa Claus was very poor or late that year. Christmas on the bay was a great occasion. The women were busy for days cooking cakes, pies, roasting meat and other good things to eat. The entire week was given over to celebrating. Girls would ride horse back, on a side saddle, thirty miles to a dance—dance all night, eat breakfast and ride home next morning. Music was furnished by three good fiddlers in the community. Another social occasion was the fish fry. The families camped for three or four days on the bay. No one was invited especially, but every family usually came. The old folks sat around and talked. The children caught crabs. The girls held one end of the net, the boys the other when seining. They usually caught enough fish to supply the group. But, if they did not, they had enough to eat any way. The coffee pot was always on the fire, and it was a real frolic.

During summer vacations the children spent many happy hours on the bay fishing or splashing around in the water.

Coffee was, and still is, served to Mrs. C. A. Mitchell in bed. But the entire family always came in for coffee about 11:30 A. M. Then coffee was not served for dinner unless company was present and preferred it.

Mrs. Mitchell still lives at the old home place on the bay, where she went as a bride. Her husband, Isaac Newton Mitchell, Jr., born in Lavaca, October 14, 1846, died on Carancuhua Bay, October 27 1880, and was buried on Wolf's Point, Calhoun county.

The children were as follows: C. S. Mitchell, married Mary Emily McNeil, and lives on his ranch at Lolita; Hugh C. Mitchell married Mary Agnes Marr, and lives in Washington, D. C., he is connected with the Geodetic Coast Survey; Annie Mitchell is dead; I. N. Mitchell 3rd, married Mamie Fromme, he is dead, but his widow still lives at Lolita.